

Thank you for inviting me to your 21st Annual Freedom Fund Banquet. I'd like to "Have My Say" this evening about the Civil Rights Movement. I believe that it is time for us to take the Movement to another level—transform it, if you will—into a movement for HUMAN rights. One human right I feel strongly about is the right to an education. I believe in the right to an education so strongly—and I believe most Americans also believe in it—that I believe it is time for us to codify that right in our Constitution. I believe EVERY child deserves the CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT to an education of equal high quality.

Education, as vital as it is, is not an AMERICAN right, it is a STATE right. Seeing as I'm in the South, you should understand some of my concern about having something as vital as education remain a state right, especially since this current states' rights system is "separate and Unequal." Millions of students in 50 states, 3,067 counties and 15,000 school districts, attend 86,000 public schools—each with varying degrees of opportunity, quality, and funding. For example, according to the latest Chicago Public Schools per capita cost report, the

Rondout District #720 in Lake County, Illinois had an average per pupil expenditure of \$17,989. Meanwhile Pleasant Hill, in District #690 in Peoria, had an average per pupil expenditure of \$2,114. That's a gap of \$15,875! You know there are similar gaps right here in Louisiana, and in every state across the nation.

I believe that nothing helps us fulfill both constitutional mandates of providing for the "common defense" and promoting the "general welfare" like a national commitment to education. Unfortunately, the word "education" never appears in our Constitution. I hope to change that, and I hope you will join me.

Placing the right to education in the Constitution ensures that we will "provide" and "promote" it in a way befitting our great nation. I stated the reason for this at the beginning of my remarks, but I want to say it again now: Because EVERY student—regardless of race, religion, socio-economic status, or residence—deserves the right to an education of equal high quality.

The constitutional right not only provides quality education for those of us concerned about quality, but it promotes competition for those worried about that. The constitutional right is both an INTER-state right, and an INTRA-state right. Poor schools on one side of Detroit, Chicago, or any other city in America, will have to be brought up to the standards set by the wealthier schools on the other side. In addition, Mississippi schools that want to be at the level of schools in Michigan or any other state, they will have the right to be brought up to that level.

This amendment can work without penalizing high-performing schools, and can even create jobs. After all, someone will have to do the construction and other jobs required to refurbish the dilapidated schools. More teachers and other education professionals will be needed. We'll even need more school cooks, janitors and bus drivers! So for some this will look like a pie-in-the-sky view of education. For others it will be a jobs program!

It is time that we as a nation democratically plan and pay for the finest public school system the world has ever

known. We have the money, the organizational skill, the technology, and the knowledge to create such a system. After studying our nation's history and political process, I have come to believe that the best way to transcend the limitations of history and politics is with an education amendment which would require us to frame the issue and set the standard. I believe that the only missing element is the political will.

Today I am humbled yet excited about this opportunity to share the vision articulated in the proposed education amendment, House Joint Resolution 29. Together, we can not only lead a renewed Civil Rights movement, but a human rights, constitutional amendments approach to public policy. We have the power to create the REAL super majority needed to move us beyond promises ... beyond programs ... beyond politics. A human rights, constitutional amendments approach will politically empower EVERY American. A human rights, constitutional amendments approach will help us complete the political work we have been doing for more than 200 years ... forming a more perfect Union.

Thank you.